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CANDID
REFLECTIONS
ON THE
REPORT.

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ON THE

REPORT

(As published by Authority)

OF THE

GENERAL-OFFICERS,

Appointed by his Majesty's Warrant of the First of November last, to enquire into the Causes of the Failure of the late Expedition to the Coasts of France.

In a Letter to a Friend in the Country.

——Non, si quid turbida Roma
Elevet, accedas, examenve improbum in illa,
Castiges trutina. Pers.

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CANDID REFLECTIONS ON THE REPORT of the General Officers, &c.

SIR,

AFTER your having all along expreſſed ſo great a curioſity for knowing what paſſed here, with reſpect to the conſequences of the failure of our expedition, I cannot be ſurpriſed that, on receiving the Enquiry thereon, publiſhed by authority, you ſhould deſire to have ſome further explanations, to clear up what may be ſtill left obſcure, or whereon to ground your conjectures of any ulterior procedure therein. Willing as I am to oblige, and at the ſame time not to deceive you, I can only aſſure you, that you may depend on nothing but the moſt exact truth in any communication of mine, ſo far as I

am capable of attaining or comprehending it. No falſhood of fact or inference will you find, that may be a reproach to my profeſſion of candor, however it may be one to my judgment or information; for neither of which I can pretend to anſwer.

I need not tell you with what eagerneſs and ſatisfaction the public received his majeſty's moſt gracious declaration of his intentions, that a faithful enquiry ſhould be made into the cauſes of the failure of an expedition, prepared with ſo much oſtentation of force, whilſt its deſtination was kept ſo profound a ſecret, and on which the perhaps over-raiſed expectation of many ſeemed to reſt the very iſſue of the war.

But though the ſpecific place on which the ſtorm was deſigned to burſt was not known, at leaſt to the public here; yet it was long enough beforehand pretty clear, from many indications, that whatever it was, it muſt lie on the weſtern coaſt of France, from Calais to Bayonne incluſively. This foreknowledge then, would doubtleſs induce the French to give orders for guarding, in the beſt manner that could be, the whole extent of the threatened country, and each particular place of it liable to inſult, in a leſſer or greater degree, according to the apprehenſions reaſonable to be reſpectively entertained for it.

To

To ſay the truth, Rochefort, the very place which, from its ſituation, ſeemed the leaſt to invite an attack, was conſequently the moſt neglected by the French in their plan of defence, and therefore bid the faireſt for ſucceſs againſt it, in caſe of its being practicable to penetrate with a body of troops, ſo far as to get before it; whilſt the diſperſion of their forces, ſtationed either in the places judged more obvious to inſult, or within reach to ſuccour them, ſhould give our's the fairer play for carrying it by ſurprize. Conſidering however its importance, eſpecially in point of its being one of the principal ports of equipment, implying in courſe its containing docks, ſtores, arſenals, and ſhipping, the deſtroying of which would be cutting the very ſinews of their marine-force, which muſt make it the more a national object for us to attempt; it cannot, reconcileably to common ſenſe, be imagined they would intirely leave it out of their general plan of defence. They might not indeed do all that would have been done to put it into a condition of not fearing an inſult, if they had feared one; but they undoubtedly made ſome diſpoſitions againſt a contingency, which if not probable, was not however impoſſible; or, no doubt, the great wiſdom of our government would not have pitched upon it for its object.

Beſides, that in all enterprizes, eſpecially meant for bold ones, all the objections, which it is ſo right to weigh and conſider, are, for all that, not to be ſlighted, on ſufficient motives to out-balance them; amongſt which not the leaſt is that axiom of marſhal Turenne's in war, That one is not always to ſuppoſe an enemy will do all that he might do. The point is to weigh reſolutions maturely; but when taken, to execute them with conſtancy and intrepidity. Whether then the expedition, now under conſideration, was defective in the projection or in the execution, ſtood the matter of a fair enquiry. But as the deciſion on the execution, by ſuch an enquiry, naturally and ultimately includes the judgment to be formed on the projection of the enterprize, the failure of it was not without propriety, made by his majeſty's orders, ſpecifically the object of examination.

But before I take notice to you of the report of the commiſſioners on that enquiry, I ſhall obſerve to you the ſtate of the public opinion on the diſgraceful return of ſo powerful an armament, without effecting any thing anſwerable to the hopes or deſigns of its outſet.

The greater part of the nation, with the beſt of meanings to its honour and intereſt, in the heat of its reſentment for diſappointed

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expectations, took the readieſt objects to vent it on, the commanders on this unſucceſsful expedition. Another part, and by far the leaſt numerous one, though equally well-meaning, remounted higher, to the plan of projection itſelf; and doing juſtice to the goodneſs of its intentions, doubted at leaſt of there having been ſufficient grounds of knowledge or information to have warranted the undertaking.

Some, merely guided by private attachments, or prejudices in favour of the projectors, or at leaſt of the principal promoter of this attempt, extolled it to the ſkies, admired the activity of the new m—n—r, that made ſo glorious a contraſt for him to the paſt indolence and inaction of his predeceſſors; not without throwing out ſhrewd hints of the envy of ſome who had oppoſed his riſe to power, having been carried to ſuch treaſonable lengths, as ſecretly to have thwarted and countermined his operations. On the other hand, others, perhaps influenced by conſiderations of the like private nature, by pique, prejudice, or even that envy of which they were accuſed, treated, or affected to treat, the whole plan as chimerical, crude, and indigeſted, both in the projection and appointment of the execution, from which no better nor other ſucceſs could be expected than what befel it; that the whole

whole of it was the ſcheme of a man, who wanted to value himſelf upon what he did not underſtand, and rather than do nothing, with which he had ſo often reproached others, would do ſomething that, he could have no juſt reaſon to imagine, would not be infinitely worſe than nothing. For which of theſe two opinions was the leaſt unjuſt, I not only refer you to the facts and teſtimonials that appear in the courſe of the enquiry, but to that knowledge of the local poſition of things, where the attack was levelled, which you either have, or may ſo eaſily come at.

It is alſo not unworthy of remark to you, and what you will eaſily believe, that the loudeſt declaimers againſt the commanders of the expedition on their return, for their tenderneſs to their perſons, their declining of danger, and the timidity of their councils, were to be found preciſely among the rankeſt cowards, or at leaſt the moſt reaſonably to be ſuſpected ſuch. You might have heard in coffee-houſes, public aſſemblies, not excluding the higheſt, perſons who had never ſeen the face of danger, nor moſt probably ever deſired to ſee it, the fierceſt in the condemnation of the gentlemen employed; ridiculous and contemptible however as this diviſion of judges may be, they are always too numerous, and ſerve to fill the cry. On the other hand, the moſt truly brave and noble, who ever judge

judge the beſt, were not aſhamed to own, they thought the non-proteſtation and concurrence of a Hawke, a Knowles, and a Broderick, (to ſay nothing of the military officers, as being with equally unattainted characters more perſonally however concerned) were a great prejudice in favour of the reſolution of returning, on taking it for granted, that nothing could be done.

I ſhall here ſay nothing to you of thoſe over-refined politicians, who pretend to diſcover in the combination of conjunctures, a tenderneſs for H—n—r, or at leaſt a connexion with the convention of Stade, which might either occaſion an armament to be ſent out, by way of amuſement, on an enterpriſe, where it was fore-known nothing could be done that might too much exaſperate France to repriſals on H———r, or an intimation to be properly given, that nothing being done, would not be the moſt diſpleaſing thing imaginable. Such conjectures, however countenanced by the iſſue itſelf, or by fortuitous circumſtances, cannot be penetrated, at leaſt by the public ; and, without proof, it is moſt certainly not only unfair, but even treaſonable to inſinuate them.

In one point however all ranks of people united, and that was a general diſſatisfaction, at this enterpriſe having either been ſo weakly projected, as not to ſuffer even attempt to ex-

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ecute it, or at the defect of the execution itſelf: it is plain the fault lay ſomewhere, and it was natural to wiſh the aſcertainment of, where the blame was to be imputed for a miſcarriage, which, not to mention the intereſts of the nation, affected by the great charge to which it was put on this occaſion, gave in the eyes of our enemies, and indeed of all all Europe; a kind of ridicule to our arms and councils, to which, moſt certainly, there before needed no addition.

The city, whoſe power of example has ſuch an influence over the other towns and corporations of the kingdom, was beginning the motion, for an enquiry, which would probably have been univerſally followed. But to this, a ſtop was put by an extraordinary, but moſt gracious preventive meſſage of aſſurance from the throne, delivered by a kind of ſubſecretary, importing, that there was no occaſion for its being addreſſed for ſuch a meaſure, which was already determined, without the trouble of ſuch an application.

Many were charmed with this unuſual ſtrain of condeſcenſion, in the court's being pleaſed to take notice of what was tranſacting in a city-aſſembly, and even preventing thoſe deſires, the formal expreſſion of which, would probably have been the reſult of its deliberation. Some indeed, thought the ſtep rather irregular, and that ſuch an interference in

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matters only under conſideration, could not on any pretext whatever, be either acceptable, or ſtrictly conformable to privilege. But, waving that queſtion as foreign to my preſent purpoſe, I ſhall go on to obſerve, that the promiſed enquiry was ſet on foot, in manner and form as you will have ſeen by the account publiſhed by authority.

You will naturally too have concluded, that the three great perſonages appointed for the examination of ſo important a matter, on ſo ſolemn an occaſion, as giving the nation at leaſt a preparatory ſatisfaction, were ſuch as were at the head of the military profeſſion, conſummated in the art of war, and had ſeen a great deal of ſervice, or at leaſt enough of it to give abundant weight to their deciſion. In ſo concluding, you will have been in the right: to none is it unknown, how much they were ſo.

Yet, however authoritatively, beyond diſpute *warranted* this board of enquiry was, as no accuſation was formed, no charge laid; the commander of the expedition, whom the enquiry principally affected, thought himſelf at liberty to call it, "*A proceeding not quite* "*common*." (Enq. p. 59.) To ſay the truth, I am not lawyer, or verſed enough in the courſe of practice on the like occaſions, to determine whether he was in the right or wrong for making ſuch an objection. Nei-

ther do I pretend to give a proper name to the procedure founded upon the royal warrant: it has indeed the air of a military inqueſt, proceeded upon by a grand-jury of general officers. But even before a grand-jury, there muſt be a bill, with ſpecification of the party charged, found for a return of *Ignoramus* or *Billa-vera*; and ſurely a trial it could leſs be called, as there was neither arraignment of party, nor ſentence, nor any thing but a bare opinion paſt, which has nothing of judicial in it, however greatly inſtructive it may be; of which more hereafter.

Should, however, the reſult of this enquiry operate in the nature of a *billa vera* of a grand-jury, without the formality of a particular charge having been included in it; certain it is, that though the commander of the expedition ought to, and probably does wiſh for nothing ſo ardently, as a regular trial proceeding upon the foundation of the report; he will, however, be under this diſadvantage, that he will have had twice to anſwer one and the ſame matter: and, that his defence will have been ſtaled by ſuch a pre-examination.

Now, I doubt not, Sir, but you will have peruſed the Enquiry with all that candor and impartiality which alone can give you a right to judge of it; and it is in that confidence purely that I offer you ſuch remarks as have occurred to me on it.

It

It cannot in the firſt place have eſcaped you, that all the officers of land or ſea, whether witneſſes or within the contingency of being parties either to a future charge, or to the blame only, unanimouſly agreed on ſupporting the expediency of returning without further attempt. Not one of them give ſo much as the leaſt reaſon to imagine there could have been any thing done againſt Rochefort, circumſtanced asthings were, except indeed ſomething of a tendency to ſuch an inſinuation may be *gathered* from the examination of colonel W--- Cl-- on whom it was more immediately a perſonal incumbence, to ſupport the honor which the information he had given in of the ſtate of Rochefort at the time he ſaw it, that is to ſay, three years before the expedition took place, had met with, in that the reſolution of having that place attacked ſeems to have been principally founded upon it.

But before I enter upon a diſcuſſion of the motives for or againſt attempting a deſcent, it may not be ſuperfluous to ſtate to you ſome material differences between the accounts given in or believed here, and thoſe which were circulated in Holland and other neutral parts of the continent.

You will ſee, eſpecially (Enq. p. 69.) in the Memorial of the actual force of France by land, &c. the ſum of it's regular troops to be under two hundred thouſand: and there

ſeems at leaſt to be ſome exactneſs in the calculation, as well as in the account of their deſtination. I am far then from calling the truth of this account in queſtion; but ſo much is certain, that the French king is more generally judged to have upwards of three hundred thouſand regulars in pay: and if this laſt ſtate of his force is exagerated, at leaſt, it is very eaſy to know whether it is ſo or not. The military liſts are, in France, open enough to examination, not to make it inexcuſable the taking any falſe meaſures by any miſrepreſentation of them.

As to the militia, and eſpecially the guardecôtes, as they are called, ſtationed along the weſtern coaſt from Calais to Bayonne incluſive. You may have known it currently received here, that there were not above thirty thouſand men ſpread along that vaſt extent of country, which muſt but thinly indeed line the coaſt of it. Whereas it is much more near to probability, if not to truth, what not alone the French themſelves give out, but what many others acquainted with the ſtate of that country aver, that there are above one hundred thouſand militia men kept up in conſtant training, and have been ſo ever ſince the year 1686, now about ſeventy-one years, ſpecifically along the weſtern coaſt. The reaſons too for keeping up ſuch a militia are obvious; being

being deſigned not only as an occaſional guard againſt any invaſion, but as a nurſery of ſoldiers ever ready to recruit their armies; the draughts for which ſervice are immediately replaced by the generalities, according to a ſettled repartition, which is ſeverely obſerved.

I have the more inſiſted on this article of the militia, becauſe it ſeems contradicted by a paragraph in colonel Cl---'s letter (Enq. p. 67.) in which are the following very remarkable words.

"By the expedition to Port L'Orient in "1746, it appeared to me, that the country-"people in arms are very little *better* than our "own; and that an officer who *poſſeſſes* himſelf, "might march ſafely from one end of a pro-"vince to another, with only five companies "of grenadiers, where there are no regular "troops. They imagine at firſt, that they "can fight, and their intentions are good, till "it comes to the point, when every body "gives way almoſt before the firing of a pla-"toon."

Now, whether that gentleman means by *country-people in arms*, only a ſudden collectitious rabble of peaſants, or the militia of the country, I cannot poſſibly think them in either of theſe conſtructions even ſo good as ours. In bravery I am ſure, the common country-people of England are, at leaſt, equal to the ſame claſs amongſt the French, and in bodily

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ſtrength greatly their ſuperiors; and diſcipline is here out of the queſtion: ſo that I grant him towards his argument for placing the French in a deſpicable light, even more than he aſks. Nor am I in the leaſt in this partial to my own countrymen: and ſurely no Engliſh officer can with a very good grace, ſuppoſe his countrymen, eſpecially the irregulars of it, inferior to the French ones; if he but recollects, that our regulars have within theſe few years ſtood in no very advantageous light of compariſon with our irregulars, either within the precincts of this iſland, or in America. The naming of Port L'Orient ſeems too a little miſplaced; for I do not remember that we made a very capital figure in that ſame expedition of ours againſt it in 1746. I do not know what proofs of cowardice, on coming to the point, the French *country-people in arms* then ſhewed; but this I know, our regulars gave inconteſtible ones of their expedition at getting on board their ſhips again. There were ſcurvy reports at that time propagated, of their having taken rather too ſudden a panic; but may be they were falſe ones raiſed by the French; though never ſufficiently contradicted here

As the above quoted paragraph, however, tended to corroborate the recommendation of an attempt to ſurpriſe Rochefort, by ſhewing there was no material oppoſition to be feared from

from the militia, or the *country people in arms*, you will not think it beſide the purpoſe, my having given you the contradictory idea others have entertained of that point. I do not pretend to ſay which is the trueſt; but I dare ſwear you will not heſitate upon pronouncing which is the moſt probable.

But granting that the militia was no ſuch invincible obſtacle to ſuch a fine body of regular troops, on the ſuppoſing theſe landed, and on their march towards Rochefort; and that it would not have ſtood a bruſh at their approach, how many eſſentials remained to be indiſpenſibly conſidered? which never were ſo, becauſe they were not even known, before Rochefort could be, with any ſhadow of reaſon, preſumed poſſible to be carried by a *coup-de-main*, if I underſtand that expreſſion right.

Definitions, it is ſaid, in law are dangerous; but in common ſenſe I am ſure, they are abſolutely neceſſary. I preſume then, a *coup-de-main* is a French term; for what in plain Engliſh I ſhould call, a ſudden exploit of arms, or ſtroke of war; the ſucceſs of which generally depends on the ſurprize and conſternation of the parties aſſailed, and the impetuoſity of the aſſailants. I do not, however, pretend to give this Engliſh tranſlation of mine for a juſt one; but of this, I am ſure, the French expreſſion, conſidering the idea it is meant to con-

convey, is a very vague and deficient one; as according to the ſtrict import of the words, there is hardly an action in war but what may come under that denomination. But not to chicane terms farther where the idea ſeems to be ſufficiently ſettled, you will eaſily ſee, in the Enquiry, that the time conſidered between the fleet's appearance on the coaſt, that is to ſay, the 20th, when the object of it's miſſion became patent, and the council of war held the 25th, that ſurprize which is one good half of the conſtitutive of a *coup-de-main*, muſt have abſolutely ceaſed, and been out of the queſtion. Unleſs, indeed, you can ſuppoſe, that after having ſo long known the general deſtination of the armament againſt the French coaſt, that people had fallen into a profound ſleep, or would ſtand with their hands folded, and omit all diſpoſitions for receiving, as the caſe required, ſuch a viſit.

As I ſincerely believe, not only colonel Cl--'s account to be exactly juſt, to the beſt of his knowledge and apprehenſion, and conformable to the truth of things; nay, that no material alterations had been made in the works for defending Rochefort itſelf, ſince the time he ſaw them in 1745; ſo muſt it be full as evident to any officer or engineer, who conſiders his deſcription, joined with the neceſſity of taking preliminarily the fort of Fouras eſpecially, at the mouth of the river,

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(of which colonel Cl---, could for very good reaſons give no account at all ;) that few places on the globe could more ſafely defy a ſudden inſult than Rochefort.

A numerous militia, a ready ſupply from neighbouring garriſons, on the appearance of a fleet, the neceſſity of ſo much time to be conſumed in a debarkation, at ſo great a diſtance as Chatelaillon-bay, and that under every diſadvantage imaginable ; or the impoſſibility of landing nearer, without taking the fort of Fouras, at the mouth of the Charente, are all ſuch glaring *remoras*, that before a body of troops could hope to penetrate before Rochfort itſelf, that town, with no more works than deſcribed by colonel C—, might with infinite eaſe, be put into a condition of laughing at almoſt any number of troops that ſhould appear before it ; eſpecially unprovided with ſtores and materials for a regular aſſault, into which the attempt to ſurpriſe it, muſt have been in courſe converted. As much as it is a rule in war, not to ſuppoſe that an enemy will think of every thing that might guard againſt an attack, as little can it be one, to ſuppoſe that he will think of nothing. And ſurely a ſupplement of the deficiencies in the works for defence, that need not take up four and twenty hours labour, could not well be imagined to have been omitted. No wonder that the French have ſince given out, that if

they could have ſpecifically named the place for the Engliſh to have pointed their attack at, it ſhould have been Rochfort. If you would believe them too, or if you will but believe the ſuggeſtion of common ſenſe, nothing could be more groſsly falſe, than the reports which prevailed here of their being ſo panic-ſtruck, with the preparations of our tremendous armament, as they were repreſented. Numbers indeed, of families, either retired from the neighbourhood of the ſhore, or, ſecured (thoſe who had any) their effects, by ſending them up the country; but nothing more: for the reſt, all the diſpoſitions were made with the utmoſt phlegm and tranquillity. The militia was raiſed, the regular troops ſtationed, in readineſs to carry their aſſiſtance where needful. And what in all this is either improbable, or rather not impoſſible, but to have beſpoke? Such a handful of men as our troops of invaſion were notoriouſly known to conſiſt of, could alarm for nothing more than for ſome ſudden aſſault, or tranſient ravage of one of their ſea-ports along the coaſt; and for their moſt capital ones, or ſuch as were the only ones worth attempting, they had little or nothing to dread, from their being inacceſſible to our ſhips; and ſurely for Rochfort, leaſt of all, ſituate up a river, unnavigable for veſſels of burthen, and where there is even no landing-

landing-place near it for troops under the cover of cannon.

(Enq. p. 20) You will ſee that this very meaſure was, 'tis very likely, greatly deſired and preſſed by his R. H. the duke, as well as the king of Pruſſia, in the hopes of its making a powerful diverſion in their favour. Too great a complaiſance then, could not well be paid to their repreſentations, and ſuch a meaſure, had it had no other motive than condeſcenſion to their requeſt, could not but be a laudable one. No leſs was owing to a prince of our own country, actually engaged with our enemy on the continent, and to a king, whoſe entertainment of the French forces, has been ſo ſerviceable to our cauſe. But ſurely they muſt have meant another ſort of diverſion, both in point of power and object, than Rochfort, or muſt have but imperfectly known the ſituation and natural ſtrength of that place. It is not ſurely imaginable, that eight or ten thouſand men deſigned againſt a coaſt, neither unprovided with regulars nor militia, to ſay nothing of the fortified places with which it is every where lined, could frighten the French court into the recalling a ſingle file of muſqueteers from Germany: that they could but do, in caſe of expecting the invaſion of an army ſufficient to attempt the conqueſt of, or at leaſt a material penetration into the heart of

their country. Such a plan required another ſort of preparation than we made for a mere coup-de-main. The ſaying of Schomberg, who had no ſort of reaſon to love the French, and was one of king William's beſt generals, is well known, viz. "That attacking France "in France, was taking a bull by the "horns;" alluding to the excellent fortifications with which it is every where provided, and which are at once its defence againſt foreign invaſion, and its tyrannical ſtrong-holds for perpetuating domeſtic ſlavery: an advantage which Britain would not wiſh to buy at ſo dear a rate, nor, thank God, has any occaſion for, whilſt its natural bulwark of a ſuperior navy ſubſiſts.

Victor Amadeus of Savoy, whoſe juſt jealouſy of French ambition no ties of alliance could diſſipate, and was certainly neither a coward nor a bad politician, on being urged to make an irruption into France, conſtantly anſwered, "That he knew a thouſand ways "into France, but did not know one out of "it again."

Can the commander of the expedition then, who was at once intruſted with the ſucceſs of it, and the lives of ſo many of his gallant countrymen, incur ſo much as the ſhadow of blame, for making a point of previouſly taking the fort of Fouras, by way of ſecuring a retreat, when the hopes of

of taking Rochefort by ſurprize were already palpably cut off? Where the open conqueſt indeed of a country has been intended, a commander has, in order to take from his troops all hopes of retreat, burnt the ſhips that brought them, from which they were to know, that there was no alternative for them but death or conqueſt. But this bold meaſure always ſuppoſed in the commander a thorough knowledge of the country he was attempting, and of the dangers he was to encounter; whereas, in this caſe, the ſtate of the place to be attacked is not, even to this hour, known here, with any ſort of preciſion ſufficient to ground a plan of operation upon it.

To have landed then, and, without ſecuring fort Fouras, to have marched on to Rochefort, without the leaſt intelligence of what diſpoſitions were there made to receive them, or on ſuch a mad preſumption as that of their having been intirely neglected, would not have argued true courage, or even merited ſo honourable an appellation as that of raſhneſs, which is often in military exploits crowned by ſucceſs; but of ſuch groſs ſtupidity and ignorance of duty, as no general, that deſerved the name of one, could have been guilty of it.

Fouras then was undoubtedly to be taken, before the reduction of Rochefort could be at-

attempted. But how? " Ay, that is the " queſtion." Difficulties invincible appeared, merely from its ſituation, againſt carrying even that paultry hen-coop. A ſingle ſhip, laying againſt it, would probably have battered it to the ground in a few hours; but even a frigate could not be got up within gun-ſhot of it (*Enq. p.* 32). The pilot Thierry engaged, indeed, to pilot a ſhip within a quarter of a mile of it; but it does not appear that he was capable of performing that engagement. The Barfleur, which drew two foot water leſs than the Magnanime (the ſhip which he deſired for that purpoſe, and which was refuſed him, on the account of the damage it had recently ſuſtained), was on ground where ſhe lay, between *four* and *five* miles diſtance from the ſhore. Even a bombketch (*Enq. p.* 44), that drew but eleven feet of water, ran aground at a greater diſtance from Fouras than the bombardier could throw the ſhells, with the greateſt requiſite of powder, at an elevation of forty-five degrees, that is to ſay, above two miles and two thirds. In the mean time, you will obſerve, the French gave them one proof of their being neither aſleep, nor frightened out of their ſenſes; ſince, whilſt the bombketch was aſhore, they detached two large row-boats with two pieces of heavy cannon in their prow, and

full

full of men each, to attack the ketch, in the face of the whole fleet; and would probably have carried her too, if the vice-admiral Knowles had not effectually interpoſed, by making a ſignal immediately for all the boats of the fleet to ſpeed to her reſcue, himſelf going on board the Coventry-frigate, to drive away the row-boats; in which time he ran a-ground, conſiderably within the ſpace of an hour, five times, and at a greater diſtance from the ſhore than the bomb-ketch.

This however may ſhew you, that Fouras was unexpugnable by our ſhipping. And here it is preſumeable, that the pilot Thierry, who had engaged for bringing the Magnanime, which drew (as before obſerved) two foot water more than the Barfleur, muſt have acknowledged his miſtake; for it can hardly be ſuppoſed that he would refuſe undertaking to pilot the ſhip ſubſtituted on ſuch good reaſons. He was not, you will remark, examined before the board, being, it ſeems, abſent, as well as ſir Edward Hawke.

It appears too, by the Enquiry, that even after the council of war of the 25th of September, in which it was *unanimouſly* agreed, that the reduction of Rochefort was, in the actual poſition of things, neither *adviſeable* or *practicable*, both the land and ſea commanders were highly unwilling to give over

all

all thoughts of landing, and attempting at leaſt to do ſomething. Some probability of ſucceſs in attacking Fouras dawning to them, in freſh information that came in to them by their priſoners, they greedily ſeized it. The coming on the back of it, by landing forces in Chatelaillon-bay, carried with it at firſt an air of temptation. Nothing ſeemed more eaſy, more inviting, or more ſafe, than a fine beach, acceſſible to boats; not a man to be ſeen on the ſhore, no batteries to annoy a landing on it: for a few guns, *en barbette*, on Chatelaillon-point, that could not reach it, are ſcarce worth mentioning. This ſpot, though at ſo much greater a diſtance from Rochefort, yet as it ſeemed to give ſome chance for an attack by land on Fouras, induced the land and ſea officers in chief command to think of putting the forces aſhore there.

Here it plainly appears, by the Enquiry, that they were ſo far from being deſirous of returning without attempting a deſcent, that they ſeized the firſt overture of one, without even a due regard to the moſt obvious rules of war, and I might not unjuſtly add, of common ſenſe. For, according to all accounts, this beach was ſurrounded by ſand-hills, conſiderably within leſs than muſket-ſhot of the water-edge, by which any number of men might have been concealed,

cealed, with the utmoſt ſafety from the cannon of the ſhips, till the inſtant of ſallying ſhould offer for taking advantages of the troops in their landing.

This too was a circumſtance in which the night would but be the more favorable to the enemies; in the confuſion they muſt ſo reaſonably hope to find troops ſetting foot on an unknown ſhore, themſelves not only being at home, with a firm footing on dry land, but in caſe of a ſuperior repulſe, being aſſured of an eaſy retreat. If it ſhould be ſaid, that the exiſtence of troops behind thoſe ſand-hills is only a gratuitous ſuppoſition, a mere begging of the queſtion; let any one who knows any thing of the matter, but aſk himſelf, whether any general could poſſibly not take it for granted, that there muſt be forces at hand, even without the information of priſoners? Would any man in his ſenſes, that knew in the leaſt what France or War was, allow himſelf to doubt of their being troops in that country, alarmed and forewarned as it had been? The motions then of our fleet being watched, as they naturally muſt have been, nothing on earth could offer a more favorable maſk to the numbers the French would have to oppoſe a deſcent, than thoſe ſand-hills. As nothing need to be ſurer too than that ſuch forces they had in readineſs; ſo it was equally

ſure, that it was their game to conceal them, till the madneſs of a deſcent ſhould afford them a cheap market of us, when not the greateſt courage could have ſtood the leaſt chance again ſuch obvious and unfair advantage.

But this was not all. When from an eagerneſs pardonable only to that courage which does not ſtand upon weighing of obſtacles, and to that juſt ſpirit of theirs for ſerving their country at all events, this landing was reſolved on; when even one diviſion of the troops was already in the boats prepared to carry them to land, you will find a new and inſuperable difficulty ſtarted. It appeared, that it was not poſſible to carry above two thouſand men at a time to the landing-place. There were they to remain ſix hours, expoſed to the whole force of an enemy, that could not well be ſuppoſed to be dead aſleep, or inſenſible of ſuch an advantage, before they could poſſibly be reinforced by a ſecond debarkation. Then it was that the commanders opened their eyes at length, on the folly of ſuch an attempt, which had been ſhut by the falſe ſhame only of doing nothing, where nothing was to be done: then it was they returned to the moſt ſenſible reſolution they had yet taken, that of the council of the 25th, of giving over what, for ſo many clear

reaſons,

reaſons, had ſo much better never have been undertaken.

I do not aſk you to ſuffer your judgment to be influenced by merely the names of the gentlemen who ſubſcribed to that conſultation of the 25th, though I firmly believe they do not yield in point of bravery even to the foremoſt of thoſe who have blamed their reſolution for returning. No! only weigh but their reaſons, and the examination previous to the report, and more eſpecially the defective information of the firſt ſuggeſter of the undertaking (be it ſaid without the leaſt offence to him, ſince he could ſay no more than he knew, and what he did ſay was probably the exacteſt truth,) and you will own, that none but the French could have wiſhed our armament had proceeded further in the execution of its miſſion. They indeed might have rejoiced, that ſo fine a body of troops ſhould fall into a trap, the groſneſs of which would have robbed them of any pity for falling into it. They muſt, in all human probability, have been the victims to a miſtake that was not their own, and that with their eyes open on the palpability of it.

But, Sir, the unpromiſingneſs of this expedition was not judged of only by the event, but numbers here, on knowing it's deſtination for the coaſt of France, and the conſtitution

of things in thoſe parts, made even no merit of pronouncing boldly, that nothing would or could be done by that grand armada. Many too, on ſeeing the equipment of ſo gallant a fleet, lamented it's not having been earlier fitted out againſt another, and the only place in which France can receive a wound in her vitals, and that is *Cape-Breton*. The infinite importance of America, and the actual ſituation of things there, loudly called for ſuch a deciſive meaſure. And what could hinder it's being taken with all aſſurance of ſucceſs, early enough in the ſeaſon, unleſs the activity of the ſtate's being about that time miſerably ſuſpended by a ſcramble for power amongſt private juntos, and inſignificant party-cabals may be given for a reaſon?

Had a much leſs armament than this one proceeded on that deſtination, the French intereſt in America muſt, in all human probability, have been deſtroyed by the ax being thus laid to the root; and the ſhips of our late unfortunate ſquadron in thoſe parts might have, not unlikely, been riding the ſtorm out ſafe and triumphant in the harbour of Louiſbourg. Thoſe who know moſt of things, know there is nothing exagerated in the conſequences, nor romantic in the hopes of ſuch an undertaking; eſpecially had it been then carried into execution. Had Rochefort even been

taken,

taken, what would have been the conſequence but the deſtruction of a few ſhips, naval ſtores, and arſenal: call it great; but ſtill it could be no more than a tranſient reparable damage: whereas by getting poſſeſſion of Cape-Breton, you not only cut off the ſpring-head of the French power in America, but may nip in the bud their beſt, and perhaps only nurſery of ſeamen for their navy, with many other advantages therefrom, too obvious to need deducing here, where the mention of it figures only as a digreſſion; but a digreſſion you will, I hope, pardon, in favor of the well-meaning of it.

In that conſultation of the 25th above referred to, and eſpecially from the opinion of the chief-engineer, who cannot be ſuppoſed very favorable to any reſolution of deſiſtence from an attempt of which himſelf was in ſome ſort the parent, you will eaſily ſee at one glance, the nature, and cauſe of failure of the enterprize. You will ſee, that not a ſoul on board knew half the requiſites to be known before any execution could be proceeded to, or even rightly planned; and at the ſame time, that it was no fault of theirs that they did not know them. Vague and contradictory reports of the ſtate of Rochefort, of its ditch and rampart; in ſhort, only the moſt material points, and ſuch as the fate of the enterprize,

and

and of the lives of thoſe employed in it, muſt turn upon, were the very points that remained, and ſtill remain perfectly unaſcertained.

The plan furniſhed from memory by the chief engineer, with at leaſt a confeſſed doubt of his, for want of information, what alterations might have been made ſince, was of itſelf ſufficient to aſſure any general or engineer, " That if no place was more capable of being " taken by aſſault, if it could be come at by ſurpriſe; ſo no place, you can perhaps name, was more capable of being, within even a few hours, put into a poſture of defence againſt ſuch a ſudden aſſault: and that no regular attack made any part of the deſign, cannot appear plainer, than for ſo good a reaſon as the engineer himſelf gives. " That the ſmall " quantity of artillery they had, was not ſent " on that plan." (Enq. p. 105.)

The poſſibility of a ſurpriſe, then being abſolutely over, the only chance for ſucceſs by a regular aſſault, muſt have been their bringing their forces before it, and that too without artillery. But even that chance, deſperate as it was, and which the commanders however were apparently determined to try, was denied them. By water, the ſituation was inacceſſible: by landing indeed at Chatelaillou-bay, that is to ſay, if the French would have been ſo very polite as not to moleſt

leſt them, in their attempt of it, they might have got perhaps before Rochfort; and what to do there? to ſtand with their fingers in their mouths, or try to batter down its defences with threats, for other effective arms they could have none. In ſhort, when I figure to myſelf the ſituation of our troops, fairly arrived before Rochfort, drums beating, and colors flying, I am tempted to think the French knew their own intereſt too well to interfere with the landing of our forces, or hinder them from proceeding up to the town. Nothing, in all human probability would have afforded them a finer opportunity, or have played the game better into their hands. No retreat, no communication with the ſhips, any more than if theſe ſhips had been at Japan, no chance for eſcaping, but by fighting their way back again, under the greateſt uncertainty in the world, of being able to get off the ſhore, even ſhould the boats be ready to take them off, and all the while harraſſed by thoſe French forces, which not invincibly to have preſumed, were ready for their reception, after ſo long an alarm, would have been a folly beneath ſerious refutation: all theſe, I ſay, incline me to think the French deſired nothing ſo much, as what ſome are ſo ſorry here did not happen. Every true Engliſhman, however, who will give his own judg-

ment

ment fair play, in ſcorn of popular and ignorant prejudice, may rejoice, that ſuch a nuuuber of his countrymen did not periſh in ſo filly a ſnare, without profit to their country, without honor to themſelves.

You will, I hope too, Sir, forgive me if I own myſelf not extremely edified by ſome paſſages in the enquiry, of which I reſpectfully take for granted, the forms of public procedure, rendered the publication indiſpenſably neceſſary; and which otherwiſe one would imagine, were highly improper to be publiſhed: and that is the names and deſcriptions of perſons, who. either they, or their families are ſtill under the French power, or are liable to come under it. Every one knows the alert and watchful genius of that government, over its ſubjects. or rather its ſlaves, whoſe actions and words are under the rigideſt comptroll of its arbitrary reſentment or caprice.

Mr. Macnamara is, if I am not miſtaken, deceaſed, or the leaſt that his politeneſs to an officer in Engliſh regimentals, in permitting him to view the works of the place, would have coſt him, was a ſevere reprimand, or perhaps a diſmiſſion from his poſt, which he would have owed to the ſpecific mention of him in the report. Further: amongſt the accidents of war, there might occaſions often offer for examination of French priſoners, from whence very

very valuable diſcoveries might ariſe. Now, might not it prove a great check on their confidence, on their communicativeneſs and natural inclination to talking; the having ſuch reaſon to think their names and perſons might poſſibly come to be publiſhed againſt them, in the procedure of ſome court-martial, or enquiry, ſo as to render them obnoxious to their own government? Might not this be a ſtrong motive for their being ſhy and reſerved? I am apt to believe ſuch publications are never practiſed under any government but ours; but at the ſame time, no doubt, it has its reaſons for being above ſuch an attention, thought I, do not pretend to penetrate them.

It was alſo for much the ſame cauſe I obſerved with infinite pain, that paſſage in Sir J. L—r's memorial of advice to Sir J. M— (Enq. p. 22.) "There are numbers of proteſ-
"tants in that province that wiſh you well,
"and would be glad to go on board with you."
This hint was doubtleſs purely intended as a private one, and never for publication, ſo that no blame can in that light fall upon it. But is it not unhappily publiſhed? All who know the nature of the French government, eſpecially its conſtant diſpoſition to oppreſs the proteſtants, muſt eaſily allow that ſuch a paragraph cannot come unwelcome to it, as it may give it a handle, at leaſt for a greater vi-

gilance, over a ſet of people thus marked out to them. Nor can they themſelves be extremely obliged to us for ſuch a deſignation: but what is ſtill worſe, it is moſt probably not entirely a juſt one. The proteſtants, who are ſtill ſuffered, or rather connived at in France, in general, picque themſelves on the utmoſt loyalty to their king and country. They deduce this duty from their religion, which even under perſecution, forbids them to turn traitors, at ſuch a criſis too, as that of an actual invaſion. If numbers of refugees, on their quitting France, and flying from the face of oppreſſion, took ſervice under powers at enmity with it; it was not till after their local reſidence in the countries in which they had found refuge, from the moſt inhuman oppreſſion at home, had changed the objects of their allegiance, that they departed from it, and became perhaps the moſt faithful, and certainly not the leaſt uſeful ſubjects of thoſe powers that were wiſe enough to give them harbour and protection. It is, I fancy, with reaſon, ſaid, that numbers of the preſent proteſtants of France, eſpecially in thoſe very parts that were the ſcene of our projected invaſion, would deſire no better than an opportunity of ſignilizing their loyalty to their country, by way of the juſteſt and bittereſt reproach to their oppreſſors, for their infamous

as well as impolitic ſpirit of perſecution. Numbers, we are told, of theſe people offered their ſervice, ſpecifically on this very occaſion, to the French government. But, however that may be, I cannot but think ſuch a paſſage might, for obvious reaſons, have better been left out, eſpecially as it is nothing to the purpoſe of the Enquiry.

I come now to the Report itſelf, given in by the appointed commiſſioners of Enquiry, and reſulting from the matter of it. (*See Enq. p.* 60.) And here I begin with fairly owning to you, that it paſſes my comprehenſion. Could ſo extravagant a caſe be ſuppoſed, as that there was a colluſive compromiſe agreed on between the projectors of the expedition and the commanders of it; that ſince ſome Report muſt neceſſarily paſs, ſuch an one ſhould be dictated as ſhould neither acquit the one, nor condemn the other; I ſhould think there could not have been a more admirable piece framed for ſuch a purpoſe.

Not a word is, indeed, ſaid in it that might impeach the wiſdom of the projection, or impute the failure of the expedition to its inſufficiency. But not a word too is there in it, but what the commanders might even glory in avowing and ſubſcribing to. If it ſatisfies the public but half as much as

it ought to ſatisfy them, then all parties owe to thoſe honorable perſonages who paſſed the Report the juſteſt thanks.

I paſs over the preamble, as being merely matter of form and introduction; and ſhall only point out to you ſome parts of the Report, that cannot but juſtify to you my admiration of it. I ſuppoſe you have it before you, and proceed.

The firſt cauſe of failure appears to have been the not attacking Fouras by ſea, at the ſame time that it would be attacked by land. But the abſence of ſir Edward Hawke, and of the pilot of the Magnanime, not admitting an examination into that particular, the opinion upon that point is left open and undecided. All that appears very plain is, that Fouras was inacceſſible to an attack by ſhipping, notwithſtanding the pilot Thierri's promiſe, which, it ſhould ſeem, he could not make good. At leaſt, in this the commanders are in no fault.

Another cauſe of failure aſſigned in the Report, is the non-attempting to land on the report received on the 24th of September from rear-admiral Brodrick and the captains, who had been ſent out to ſound and reconnoitre; when, inſtead of landing directly, a council of war was called on the 25th, in which it was *unanimouſly* reſolved *not* to land,

land, as the attempt upon Rochefort was neither *adviſcable* nor *practicable*. To ſay the truth, after ſuch a report as the commanders then received, after what they themſelves could ſee of the local poſition of things, and what they muſt know or preſume of the ſtate of the country, they were, if it is not too diſreſpectful in me to ſay ſo, rather in the wrong for calling any conſultation, if their reſolution could have diſpenſed with the form of it: for, in fact, there was no matter of conſultation at all. The nature of the errand they were ſent on, and the impoſſibility of its execution, were already plain enough.

" *But* it did not appear that there were " then, or at any times afterwards, either " a body of troops or batteries on the ſhore, " ſufficient to have prevented their deſcent." This is moſt religiouſly true. As to troops, nothing can on earth be more certain, than that troops there were and muſt be in the country; and as certain, that the French muſt have been very great ideots indeed to have ſuffered them to be *ſeen*, when it was ſo eaſy and ſo much their game to conceal them. As to batteries in Chatelaillon-bay, the only convenient place for a deſcent, not one officer ever ſaid there were any, or did not but aver the contrary; but who of them could

could not but ſee the impropriety, according to all the rules of war and of common ſenſe, of effectuating a deſcent, from which no good could be hoped for the ſucceſs of the main of the enterprize, the attack upon Rochefort? Could any thing counterballance the moral aſſurance of being cut off diviſion by diviſion, which muſt have been the caſe, unleſs the French could be ſuſpected of falling off, on ſuch a tempting occaſion, from their uſual alertneſs, or have only ſuſpended its exertion, in order to draw us more compleatly into the ſnare?

"It does not appear (ſays the Report), "that there were any ſufficient reaſons to "induce the council of war to believe that "Rochefort was ſo far changed, in reſpect "of its ſtrength, or poſture of defence, "ſince the expedition was firſt reſolved on "in England, as to prevent all attempts of "an attack upon the place, in order to "burn and deſtroy the docks, magazines, "arſenals, and ſhipping, in obedience, "&c."

To all this the commanders might chearfully ſubſcribe, ſince it does honor both to their ſenſe and obedience. They were ſent ſurely on the plan of a ſurprize, or coup-de-main. Nothing can be plainer than their inſtructions on this head: but that caſe of

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ſurprize not exiſting, as conſidering the ſituation of that place, it could never, but by the favor of a miracle, exiſt: Rochefort might not indeed very materially be changed as to its ſtrength, or poſture of defence; but obviouſly ceaſed, from the inſtant there was no hope of coming on it by ſurprize, to be a place poſſible to be taken by a ſudden aſſault.

As to what the Report adds, " that no " reaſon could exiſt ſufficient to prevent the " attempt of landing the troops, previous " to the 28th of September, as the council " *then* unanimouſly reſolved to land with all " poſſible diſpatch." Nothing can be more juſt, on the ſuppoſition that it was right to have landed at all. It is even too favorable to the commanders; for certainly every hour's delay, after the inſtant of their arrival, ſtrengthened their reaſon for not landing, could that have required ſtrengthening. And they are juſtly puniſhed for the imprudence of not adhering to their firſt and beſt reſolution of the 25th not to land at all, unleſs their zeal for attempting evident impoſſibilities, in the ſervice of their country, may be allowed to excuſe them, and the intention acquit them for the abſurdity of their perſeverance in an enterprize, of which their own perſonal knowledge might have

already

already ſufficiently exploded the plan to them.

Even then by the report itſelf, abſtracted-ly conſidered, you may, Sir, eaſily diſcern, whether the failure is imputable to the original ſin of inſufficiency in the project itſelf, or to the perſons commiſſioned to carry it into execution. You may ſafely pronounce, without the hazard of a raſh judgment, on the materials of information before you, whereon the enterprize was it ſeems embraced and planned, whether all the prerequiſites of knowledge were duely obtained before the diſpatch in the armament (that is to ſay, on ſuppoſing that it was ever ſeriouſly meant, or hoped that it ſhould ſucceed) or whether a ſet of gentlemen of unattainted characters, and truſted with the arms of their country, could be ſo groſsly wanting to its honor, and to their own, as to return back with ſo bad a grace, if a better knowledge and a perſonal view of things had not forced them to it, with a regret they rendered but too apparent, by perſiſting in it ſo much beyond the bounds of their duty, that one would have thought them willing to prefer the bare *opinion* of others at a diſtance, to their own actual and palpable recognition on the ſpot.

Should

Should you, however, after ſettling this point in your own mind, proceed to any degree of curioſity for what further may be expected from this meaſure of an enquiry, which ſeems but a preparatory one to an ulterior procedure upon it, it is not at leaſt to me you muſt addreſs yourſelf for ſatisfaction. The low level range of humble common ſenſe can never pretend to reach the ſublimity of thoſe clouds in which the exalted wiſdom of our councils has ſo long rolled, and carried the public affairs to that pitch of proſperity and renown in which they are at preſent ſo conſpicuouſly ſeen. But if you will deign to accept a general rule of conjecture on any future turns of affairs that as yet lie hid within the womb of time, or in the heads of our modern ſtateſmen; a rule that has for theſe many years hardly been known to fail; this it is. Imagine to yourſelf ſpecifically what is moſt agreeable to common ſenſe, and to the once believed juſt order of judgment, and then do not be *ſurpriſed* at finding the event diametrically oppoſite to it. In the preſent current of things, no oracle can afford you a ſurer prognoſtic than this method of anticipation by contraries. Should you then find a ſtatue decreed to the great projector of this celebrated expedition, and national

diſgrace, or even an ignominious puniſhment allotted for thoſe unfortunate enough to have been ſent in command upon it, there can be nothing ſo ſtrange in ſuch a diſtribution of juſtice as to make you ſtare at it, if you reflect upon all the unaccountableneſs in our judgment and affairs for theſe many years laſt paſt. The folly would indeed now be to be ſurpriſed at any thing.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

ERRATA.

Page 6, l. 4: for *are*, read *are not*. P. 95, l. 14. for *thought*, read *though*. L. 15, for *I*, read *I* no comma.

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H. Stevens
Jan. 70